

The Nass is coming. Find a nice comfy ark and kick your feet up—it's gonna be a while.

The Nassau Weekly



Volume 49, Number 4
March 27, 2025

In Print since 1979
Online at nassauweekly.com



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Dear Reader,

This week, the Nass reflects on movement and the conditions that govern it. We like to imagine written words dancing on the page: in flux, unrestricted, and active, a magazine whose words destabilize but don't displace.

As demonstrated in this issue, the unfettered mobility of words is a fiction—regulations inhibit the movement of both people and pages. We work with the understanding that words can be either instrumentalized for freedom or repression. For every essay there is an eviction notice; for every word written, another is censored. Borders are increasingly enforced, and our intention is to produce content which rejects and resents any fragmentation.

Maybe our titles and articles reflect an unintended melancholy: surveillance, borders, and antediluvian anxiety are on our mind. In this issue (as in all the rest) we're asking for you to play along with the dance our writers have choreographed. Engage with the text even after you've moved on.

Until next time,

Frankie Solinsky Duryea and Alex Norbrook, EICs

Masthead

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This Week:

By Amy Başkurt

Hi! I hope that everyone's spring break was great and that you are excited to be back on campus. This latter part of the semester is chock full of events, especially as more and more seniors are showcasing their independent work. Read on for a week of Princeton's best goings on:

VIS Shows

As mentioned, there are many many senior visual arts shows this week. Starting off with **Corey Segal's Iocus, Monster Mash by Caroline Weaver, and Immortality by Audrey Zhang**. Segal's work is sculpture, runs until **April 4th**, and is located at **Hagan Gallery, 185 Nassau St**; Weaver is exhibiting painting and sculpture, at Lucas Gallery, 185 Nassau St; and Zhang is showcasing multimedia arts, at the **LCA's Hurley Gallery**. Both Weaver and Zhang's shows close **March 28th**, so hurry to catch them!

The Music Scene

Next, let's take a look at Princeton's imminent music-making. **Saturday Mar 29th, 7:30-9:30pm**, make sure to be at the **Princeton University Chamber Choir's concert**, featuring Joby Talbot's contemporary piece "Path of Miracles." More solo-inclined? I have shows for you! The dedicated Sarah Lekaj and Theo Wells-Spackman have their **senior vocal recitals Sunday March 30th**, in **Fine Hall's Taplin Auditorium**. Lekaj is performing 3-4pm while Theo is at 7-8pm. You can catch both!

Move It!

Need a reason to stand up and move around? Come to the LCA's last **Hip-Hop Techniques and Foundations** with Caitlin Marks of the semester. **March 29th, 3-4:30pm**, come develop the basic foundations of street dance. All levels of experience are welcome!

Keep exploring, Princeton! I'll be back next week with more menagerie.

Email Amy Başkurt at ab7955@princeton.edu with your event!

For advertisements, contact Ellie Diamond at ed7627@princeton.edu

Verbatims:

Overheard before lecture

Misinformed historian: "I hate the Irish. I'll never forgive the Irish for starting the potato famine."

Overheard in Terrace

Girl with beautiful hair: "I don't think she's ever experienced discomfort in her life. Well, except for when I caused her discomfort."

Overheard in passing

Old woman, excitedly: "Any opioids...I'm in!! Count me in!!"

Overheard over English Breakfast

Freshly back from a trip abroad: "No one wanted us there...but they were friendly."

Overheard on International Women's Day

A Hater: "I love hating. I love so many things honestly too, but I think it's really hard to get a reputation as a lover."

Overheard on WhatsApp

Likes to mix it up: "The three kinds of music I'm always listening to are harsh noise, jazz, and Midwest emo."

Overheard in a living room

Bored mom, about NYT Spell-ing Bee: "I got genius once and then I was hooked, like drugs."

Overheard in the Architecture Library

Humanities student: "I don't think I've ever had to study for an exam."

Overheard in office hours

Bored professor: "Grad student encounters. They're always so memorable."

Overheard in an SLA class

Professor: "There was once a time, and I know you guys don't remember this, where if you wanted something to turn on, you flipped a switch."

Overheard in an Astrophysics textbook

Chapter 5: "What are the properties of a hairless hole?"

Overheard in Cap and Gown

Striped-shirt straight guy: "I've never met a bisexual guy I didn't find annoying."

Submit to Verbatims

Email thenassauweekly@gmail.com

The *Nassau Weekly* is Princeton University's weekly news magazine and features news, op-eds, reviews, fiction, poetry and art submitted by students. *There is no formal membership of the Nassau Weekly and all are encouraged to attend meetings and submit writing and art. To submit, email your work to thenassauweekly@gmail.com by 10 p.m. on Thursday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!*

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Join us: We meet on Mondays and Thursdays at 5 p.m. in Bloomberg 044!

About us:

Middle of Nowhere, Zen New Jersey

It's all alphabet soup
in 12-pt font,
bitter black bleeding
into vegetable stock—
A poem or two or three, falling
into one another like bodies in
orbit

By NELL MARCUS

Spring break now, a week in D.C. in a house that isn't mine, and I've never needed it more. But in the early evening, Ollie's napping, and my heart's still beating for New Jersey—can't help myself

Last week, midterms week. No jacket and no umbrella when the rain came—couldn't help myself. Under water, soaked underfoot, dark under-eyes. Walked into the astronomy building seeking guidance from someone dry

Helpless, hapless, in the exam, forgot what time it was, some kind of paranoid delusion, fatigue, confusion, a funny story on the phone to my mom

Black holes in my vision—can that be normal?—and two ibuprofen liquid gels, like clockwork down my throat.

Saturday before break, on the ride back from New York, I caught a glimpse—my reflection in the clouded window—tired, nauseous, looking back, back—

toward the city, fading fast. I hadn't wanted to come, and I couldn't wait to leave, but I still struggled to straighten my stubborn fingers out of its soil. Ran to the subway, catch NJ Transit back, back—

toward Whitman, before 8:00, barely, for a wilted salad and a sad-empty stomach

toward vague swarms of people and the hum of the hive, half-hearted smiles—the gifts we give to one other

toward conversations like concentric circles, never converging on a point. At the new salad place on Nassau, attempting to devise a new theory of attraction and explain away the concern on Sofia's face

toward the couch at Terrace, where on a Wednesday my dad called—Dead Dog, long pause. Wasn't sure, at first, how to feel or whether it was silly to feel much at all. One sad song, and I folded into friendly arms, let myself cry.

Under the bed days later, I cried again, how I would at the kitchen table if I couldn't solve a math problem

Wondering why I can't write poetry, why I can't write. Wondering why I feel like I have so much to say but nothing ever comes out right. Telling myself it's alright,

To stare at an empty google doc and watch the cursor blink again and again, to try and journal—if nothing else, good to feel the words in smudged ink on my thumb and my teeth on the top of the plastic cap, biting down—

on the floor, I sat and held my breath on Saturday night. Wondered why I can't fall in love and if I'm in love already. Wondered why I so often end up on the floor, looking up—

on the top floor of New South, night class. Holding an orange in my hands, feeling its cool skin against my palm, too self-conscious to peel it with eyes on me, I threw it out—

on a Thursday again, told myself I wouldn't go, but I did. Couldn't hear the music, couldn't close my fists around the words, couldn't tell whether I was hungry or tired or just plain angry.

Realizing I'm back again, writing

it all down, and still nothing seems to mean anything It's all alphabet soup

in 12-pt font,
bitter black bleeding into vegetable stock—

A poem or two or three, falling into one another like bodies in orbit, an essay about four-legged February, standing still— followed my frustrations to about 1000 words, then decided that wasn't right either,

I'm looking for myself in the margins of Dostoevsky and in the spaces between our shoulders, and I'm coming up empty, again and again

Trying to find something beautiful about the Nassau Park Pavilion Panera, the Princeton Public Library, and the Frist burrito bowl line

Almost through my second year, and I'm starting to lose my footing, topsy-turvy on icy Washington at dinner with friends and in lecture—I just can't get my head around special relativity—

On the Amtrak back, at the speed of light, spring in Washington shrinks away—and again, I'm poised toward a puzzle I can't solve

Pieces of me in Princeton, all edge and no middle,
next stop now—

Middle of nowhere, Zen New Jersey.

Nell Marcus catches a glimpse of her reflection in the margins of the Nassau Weekly.



Betwixt & Between

Borders, mobility and friendship in Spain's North African enclave.

By CECILE MCWILLIAMS

Every week, Mohamed drives a tour bus across the Spanish-Moroccan border. He has an ex-wife and something like nine kids. His plump and friendly face is speckled with stubble. When he is not working as a bus driver for tourists, he gets around on his motorcycle. He is a man of God and enjoys apple cake. He is proud of his oldest daughter, the first Muslim woman to get a certain scholarship at the University of Madrid, and he calls me a friend.

Over the summer, I spent two weeks in Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in Northern Morocco. Traveling on Princeton's dime, I had loose plans to research migration. In 2021, around 9,000 migrants took advantage of Morocco's momentary negligence of the border—the result of a diplomacy skirmish—to cross into the European Union. The “avalanche,” as the event was somewhat tastelessly dubbed in Spanish, was a peak in a broader trend. Thousands of migrants enter Ceuta each year. I was interested in the ways migration shapes the culture of a place that is European but not in Europe, Catholic but heavily Muslim, and, maybe most importantly for me, like nowhere I had been or heard of. After crossing

a border, and then a strait, and then a brown door of an Airbnb in the eastern part of the city, I was setting up something like a comfy vantage point from which to make an insight people might find somewhat valuable. The circumstances were absurd, when I thought of it. One day I had looked at my bank account and found a check to take to another continent, just to see where an idea would go.

The cabinets in my Airbnb were bright red. I bought a plastic spatula for less than three euros, and it spat off melty flakes of black rubber as I prodded chicken on the stove. It is strange to feel embarrassed when no one is watching.

I talked to three migrants, all young men from Morocco, who had swum in the dark around the border fence, empty bottles tied to their limbs as floaties. One of them showed me a photo of him in the local news, clad in a blue North Carolina varsity jacket which glowed neon against the street-lit dark. The article told the story of how he crossed with two friends, one of whom drowned, while the third swam back to Fnideq, Morocco, the city that shares a border with Ceuta. None of the migrants I spoke to planned to stay long in Ceuta. They were all passing through, hoping to find work in peninsular Spain or in some other European country.

Common measures grounded their stories, and gave my notes a format. The migrants had been in Ceuta for twenty days, a few days, five months. They had been in the water for eight hours, five hours, six hours (“Or two days? Unclear,” I wrote in my notes). Without meaning to, I collected data, perhaps an attempt to permeate the patchwork of translation with facts and figures. I don't speak Darija, the Northern African variety of Arabic native to the migrants I talked to. An administrator at an NGO that provides meals to vulnerable groups in Ceuta, and the place where I volunteered in the mornings, translated between me and the migrants. I jotted down numbers and details, trying to hold eye contact with the stranger in the plastic chair beside me. I croaked the few words of gratitude in Darija I had rehearsed. I silently thanked my height, my demeanor, my gender and my age, the sum of things that made me look approachable. I wondered if I had trespassed into a world completely unfamiliar to me and overstayed my welcome, and I wondered if this inkling was borne of anxiety or prudence. The border between transgression and immersion seemed fine but worth discerning. In spare moments I repeated basic Darija phrases after a stranger on YouTube shorts, parroted around a big kitchen with no sharp knives.

The staff at the NGO taught me how to cut zucchini in precise quarters, my hands floating above a pool of water in the bucket below. They giggled at my botched pronunciation of the Darija words they taught me. Over breakfast one morning, a staff member spooned canned tuna on toast and joked that her coworker was up all night thinking about a boyfriend. In the kitchen, a man entered yodeling as he drummed his hand against a pot. Another staff member looked at me and said that they let him work there because, well, he isn't right up there and tapped her head. She doubled over in laughter when she saw that I bought it. There was comfort in peeling carrots and laughing at other people's jokes. A nine-to-five job, or a ten-to-two volunteer shift, for that matter, was a beautiful way to keep from loafing.

In the afternoons I invented errands for myself. I convinced myself that I needed a camera that also printed stickers. I had to paint my nails red. I bought tomatoes. I bought a pastry. I bought beer and remembered how great Angelina Jolie and Winona Ryder are in *Girl, Interrupted*. I had a lot of time and little, concretely, to accomplish. It was hard to write alone and hard to eat alone. I asked the fruit vendor for his name and where he traveled on vacation. I took up more of a salesman's time than I needed in a sunglasses shop. There was freedom in every exchange. Nobody



could tell me I was faking it. It was like being the new kid. But it is one thing to talk to people and quite another to shape your day around their routines. Too rigid for spontaneity, I filled empty hours with arbitrary tasks. I walked everywhere because it took longer than taking taxis or public transportation. I read about Ceuta in books on the beach. Certain things next to each other can be dreadful. I read about fourteen immigrant deaths on the border beach at the hands of Civil Guards, put down the book spine-down, and swam in the ocean. A sense of duty to this little project I had deemed important was laced with an inkling that perhaps I should enjoy myself.

I went to three travel agencies before I found a way to visit Morocco. My advisor at Princeton had said that to understand the border, if something like that can be done, you should see it from both sides. It is some measure of the difference between the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic border that there are no longer daily trips to Morocco, just weekly ones (and some measure of Ceuta's ties with other places that physical travel agencies still exist there). I paid sixty euros for a day trip to Tetuán. I saw walnuts sandwiched in dates. A rug vendor told me his young co-worker has always wanted an American girlfriend. An old woman stepped out of her house to share an Arabic proverb. On the bus, I sat right behind the driver, Mohamed, who I realized was perhaps better positioned than anyone to understand what I wanted to learn. His interactions with the border and people trying to cross it had been firsthand and frequent. And, importantly, he liked to talk. Before I left the parking lot at the port in Ceuta, we exchanged numbers, and on the long walk home, I drafted in my head a request to interview him, which I sent in a voice message that

night.

His response was a four-minute recording.

I had made a great impression on him, he said. *I would love to be friends.* It was so easy, I thought, to win people's sympathy simply by letting them talk. He offered to take me on his motorcycle and show me the parts of Ceuta where the tour bus cannot reach: a couple lookouts in the mountains, the unofficial border to the West where migrants also cross. I leaned back on the counter and considered the offer, pretending, perhaps just for myself, that I was going to say no. It was, on paper, a bad idea to hop on a stranger's motorcycle alone. I had zero close friends in Ceuta. I did not own pepper spray. Maybe it was boredom, but my gut and my rational self were out of alignment. Safety was so mental. Couldn't I just decide this was safe?

I told Mohamed that sounds great.

Honestly, I feel like I've known you a long time, he said. You're a good kid. He told me Ceuta is beautiful at night, we could go now, but it was too cloudy. Cultural barriers explain—or maybe just offer an excuse to dismiss—so many potentially creepy suggestions. Spaniards: they're just night owls!

The following afternoon, I waited for Mohamed on a bench in front of a bar. A large woman sporting heavy bags and two small children sat down right next to me.

"You're still here?" she said after a few long seconds.

"Sorry," I said, and got up.

A couple minutes later Mohamed pulled up across the street on a giant motorcycle, an extra helmet in hand.

We went to one lookout, and then another. Our conversation moved from migrants to pretty views. Riding on the back of the motorcycle eased the pressure to talk. If I loosened my grip on his shoulders, I could feel how fast we were really going. I felt stable enough to take a video on my phone. I was over the novelty of it all, but the view of the curved sea peeking up from behind the dry spiny mountains begged documentation. We also passed migrants, meandering in the wooded streets. Sub-Saharan, Mohamed said, who were residing at the CETI, the shelter for unaccompanied minors. We passed the CETI. Towels hung off the rails outside the two-story complex of ramshackle dorms.

We stopped at a cement picnic table at some high hill for the interview. It was strange to suddenly grow severe, to steer the conversation to

the border and kids who had tried to cross it slinking under the fender flares of Mohamed's tour bus. I could not get over and still am not over the sheer randomness of my visiting Ceuta, trying to get closer to a topic I have nothing to do with, trying to cross borders that an American passport seems to make vanish, like magic or like the luck of where you were born.

Later, sitting across from each other in the bar on the upper level of the port's waiting area, we shared the few dishes on the menu that didn't have pork. He complained about the new owners of the bar, and the incompatibility of Ceuta's culture with some Islamic rituals. He told me about the shouting matches him and his cousins have over the correct interpretation of the Qur'an. He condemned divisions among Jews, Muslims, and Christians. I told him I grew up

with minimal religion.

"Do you exist?" he asked, staring at me behind olive eyelids.

"Yes."

"God exists."

Now, listening back to his audio messages, I am tempted to reduce Mohamed's generosity to mere advertisement. He had told me about his plans to split from his tourism business and go independent, taking people to Tangier, Tetuán, and the desert in Morocco. I could bring friends next summer, he would organize everything, hotels, everything. And I thought this sounded great. I left convinced it could happen, convinced that next summer, I would speak Darija and ride a motorcycle through dunes in Morocco.

I probably will not. But there is some glee in such a hypothetical. I think often about this line from *The Idiot*, by Elif Batuman: Selin says, "For all my life there had been another world, and no one had come out, and no one had gone in—until one day the borders turned out to be fictitious." I went to Ceuta naively hoping to find some fiction in borders. I found that Selin is wrong. The borders are not fictitious; the borders are in fact quite real. But some borders easily slacken. To amble is too high a privilege not to seize, the borders between nerves and guts, between religion and atheism, between me and you, too permeable not to touch.

Cecile McWilliams *spatulas and zucchinis her way into the Nassau Weekly*.



NO OTHER LAND

Documenting dispossession in Basel
Adra and Yuval Abraham's latest film.

By NARGES ANZALI

Darkness has fallen on the West Bank. Phone screens light up the faces of Basel Adra and Yuval Abraham. One Palestinian, One Israeli, they are the co-creators of Academy Award Winning Documentary *No Other Land*. A phone chime propels us into action. Basel has been tipped off regarding the demolition of yet another village in Mafasser Yatta, a region in the occupied West Bank which the IDF has taken over and converted to a training ground. Basel runs through his own house, looking for a camera with which to document the imminent horror. By uploading the footage to social media, he will force us to reckon with the brutal demolition of homes, crying mothers, and screaming children, with a man shot point-blank range in the head in front of his family. *No Other Land* brings you up close—even if you wish it wouldn't. The documentary forces us to realize that for the residents of Masafer Yatta, there is no escape. They have no other land.

Basel and Yuval drag us along ruthlessly. Cameras are everywhere. Basel runs to every demolition with a camera in hand and trains the lens on a soldier's face. The soldiers have cameras too. As do the settlers (Israeli recipients of the land taken from Palestinians). As does the commander who watches his men, making sure they brutalize enough bodies and savage sufficient homes. He documents proof of the mission, like an Amazon delivery man who's just successfully delivered a package. We, the viewers, watch these players as they watch each other. "They're going to find you,

traitor," says a settler to Yuval, camera on his face. A chilling reminder that there is another side to this story. A side in which each home destroyed is a victory.

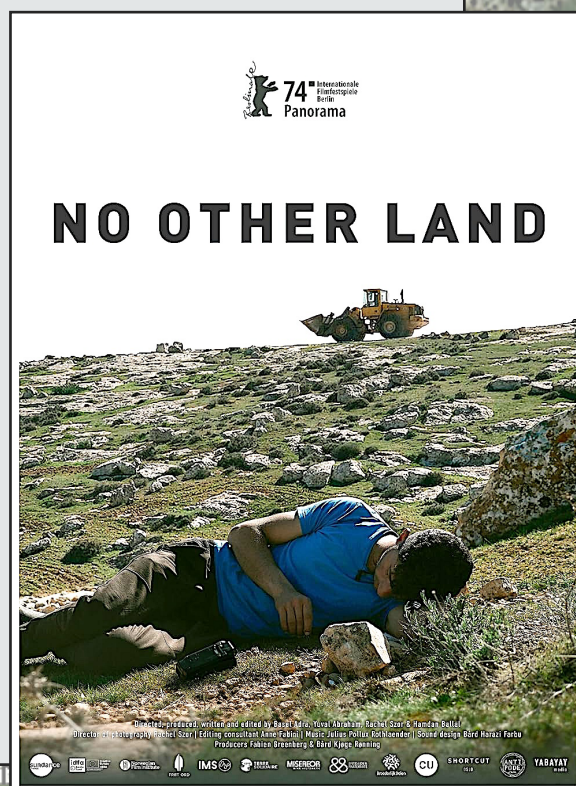
In Palestine, to document is to grasp for power. This documentary is about clicks, likes, views. There is proof that this works: To get people to care about the kind father, Harun Abu Aram; to get people to care when a school crumbles and children hop out of windows as bulldozers head for their classrooms. To get people to care when armed settlers taunt the villagers: "This is not your land." We watch as Basel's eye sockets become hollower with exhaustion. We see Yuval drive back home to visit his mother, past the Israeli-only checkpoint. As they sit and smoke together back in the West Bank, Yuval dreams of a life in which his friend can come over to his house for dinner. "If there is a democracy," says Yuval. "If," laughs Basel, and keeps on smoking.

In the cleverest twist of all, we see ourselves watching. They get clicks, they get likes. They gain traction—on *Democracy, Now!* On Israeli talk shows, on Twitter and Facebook and Instagram. We see Western journalists visiting the mother whose son, Harun, has just been shot. He doesn't want to see people, she insists. The reporters proceed to the cave anyway, and ask Basel to translate Harun's moaned request for them to leave. They interview his mother, and she begs for help. For a single clean room, instead of the floor of a cave. As the journalists leave, Harun's mother tells the camera that she prays God will take him instead of letting him suffer so long. His mother prays to God that her own son will die.

And he does die. A clean room is an impossibility. The screen goes black. In what resembles an epigraph, we are

shown the last piece of footage Basel takes in his village. An armed settler shoots his cousin dead on the street. His mothers scream can be heard from off-screen. Yuval asks: "we make them feel something, then what?"

That is the question: *then what?* After a year and a half of genocide, over 40000 deaths, many of which we have watched, on Instagram of all places, killings which murderers own proudly—*then what?* You watch the movie—then what? I say "you watch the movie" because you **should** watch it. Ignorance is no longer a reasonable excuse. In his Oscars acceptance speech, Basel says that he hopes his newborn daughter will not have the same life he lives now. "We call on the world to stop the injustice and stop the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people," Basel says, on the biggest stage in Hollywood. The answer is clear—*Now*, it is time we act.



Producers Fabien Greenberg & Bard Kjøge Rønnli

Print.

for Mickey
17. a spluttering birth.
matter and hope, all
poison or ponzu - all
recycled. polished clone.
Crown, knoll. seasoned
with milky weed. skin,
ours. sin,

Everyone is.

Prprint.

worm, the rat
runs, vermin, all-
cap it, for those who
do not win.
Saucy
money and
their sh*t.
Boer war. Better off
not knowing the damage caused.
dead body. whose body?
who's a body? Everyone
is.

Pr-

rrt.

Print-

is something
wrong, his brick-
block head did not
run the gauntlet. trash. take it
up to Punch. laugh. mash-
un analliance - good who hates and
evil

who loves. the hate
of a jolly Roger
who'd rob her,
Sally the ship, of the week.

any day now, we will
die all the time. two
cyclops eyes, one for Yeun and thine.

Prprint.

arrive now. run,
rat. the grey worm under your
bed or a subtle
caverolling. handsushi
maggots but fine,
perfect-f**k the
saucy money
and their sh*t.
this grub
fine
where
it was
in the dirt.

no need to make him
breathe
all
this
important hair

Haa...Print to print. -tchyou!

Everyone is
a thick-lipped
sinner, broad-faced
winner, blind hog
hitter. victory as
Norse or worse,
the dusty land of
the free maudlin
Church. the bluets
pink, for a dead
baby - bring it
here - the krown is
white and
clown, Bolind Andeaf.
Everyone is.

Pr

hug him who
does not live in sin,
no dust. notice,
only his. own sediment
and nothing should exist. intro
to what. prelude,



encore to, a bohemian
psycho, this card isn't
gloating, in the sewer
it is grey. the worm, native ancestral,
the will. The heart-crushing
liver, drill, sound damning
slowly.
int

print,
elegance, of the
One. *perform*
the bard - the
new nurm, *O*.
Sole form, no more. *gh!* **new!**
morn! *ouls-*
Eight-Teen, you will
make of that what
Everyone is.



Pieta

By UKYUNG (HEIDI) NAM

Ground Rules

A renowned Princeton developer wants to fight the housing crisis. But at what cost?

By ARIEL CHEN

ON A CHILLY GRAY December afternoon, at the heart of Witherspoon Street in Princeton, NJ, fifty people crowded around a table in the Hillier LLC architecture studio. Bright LED lights diffused from large vertical windows into a thickening evening fog. Inside, cream-colored cubicles, architectural awards, and miniature house prototypes lined the spotless office. The walls are covered with designs: a 3D model of the historic Witherspoon Street, a map of the same street's side profile, and a rendering of remodeled houses.

All the designs spanning the wall come from one project coming to fruition after ten years of planning: Hillier's Witherspoon Street Redevelopment. And it has drawn the crowd here. The project, formally known as Affordable Housing Overlay-7 (AHO-7), will demolish and redevelop 34 housing units that the firm owns along the west side of Witherspoon. The project is marketed as a promise to increase housing capacity and improve living conditions. Yet, as rent prices are expected to soar after redevelopment, current tenants are uneasy about housing insecurity.

Most attendees at the meeting were families of working-class Latino immigrants living on Witherspoon, in one of the housing units that Hillier hopes to demolish. "They said that the redevelopment is happening anyway,"

said Juan Regalado, a Honduran immigrant who lives in the area. "Se hace lo que se hace." *They do what they need to do.* Sporting dark curls beneath a backward-turned baseball cap, Regalado arrived in Princeton from Honduras 11 years ago to join his sister and has lived here ever since. Now, he works for Resistencia en Acción, a local grassroots organization fighting for immigrants' and workers' rights.

Confronting Hillier in his studio, the crowd refused to accept displacement as the answer. "All the families you are evicting from their homes," Regalado asked Hillier, "Where will you move them?"

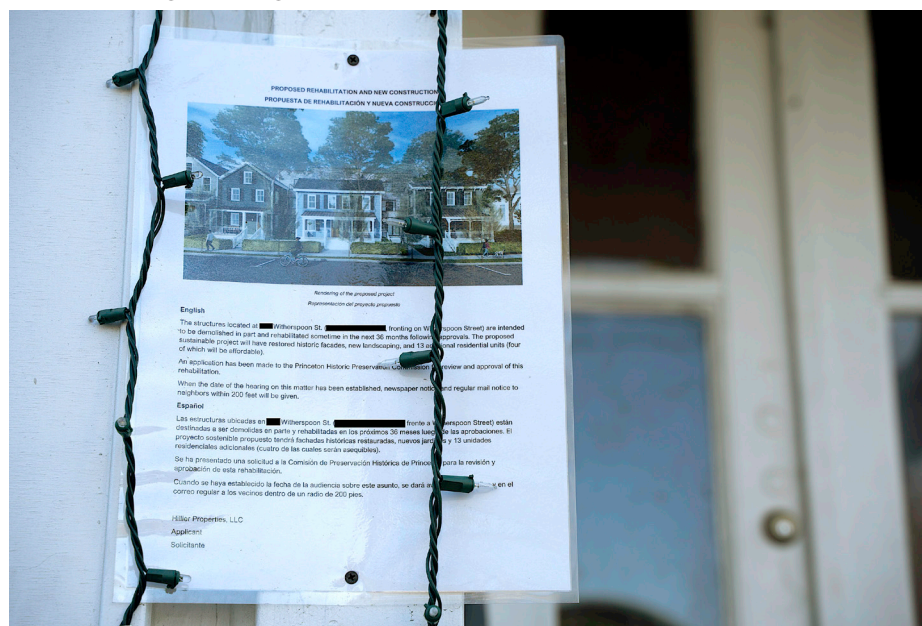
According to Regalado, Hillier

only replied, "I can't answer that right now."

Historically populated with Irish and African Americans, the Witherspoon-Jackson area is one of the last few remaining low-income neighborhoods at the heart of a very expensive Princeton. Over the past two decades, it has attracted a growing Latino population of essential workers. Now, facing a redevelopment plan and subsequent rent increase, the neighborhood's demographics could change again. And both sides are bracing for what happens next.

AS THE CLOCKSTRUCK 12 PM in Chapin, a Mexican and Guatemalan restaurant on Witherspoon, more young men crowded in, chatting in hushed Spanish. The rich blend of corn and flour sits in the air. Chapin is like a nook, with white ceramic tile tables, limited seating, and shelves filled with packaged nachos, TorTrix, and Zambos snacks. The cashier, a middle-aged woman with a sweet smile and hair tightly bundled in a hairnet, called out orders and handed cartons of take-out food in plastic bags swiftly. "*Quesadilla! Chuleta y caldo de pollo!*" A wooden carving of a Resplendent Quetzal, Guatemala's national bird, sits near the window. If you step outside and down the street, you will find *Conexión Latina* (Latino connection) Multiservices and *La Mexicana* food store.

Today, 30% of Witherspoon Jackson is Latino. But historically, Witherspoon-Jackson was populated by Black families. By the 1700s and the beginning of the 1800s, descendants of enslaved people and black Southerners found employment in the expanding University (then the College of New Jersey). Witherspoon-Jackson was a segregated and vibrant Black neighborhood, nicknamed the "North's Southmost Town." Buildings like the Witherspoon School for Colored Children, Mt. Pisgah AME Church, and Witherspoon Presbyterian Church, all come



An eviction notice issued by Hillier Properties LLC, tacked onto the front of a home on Witherspoon Street (photo by Faith Ho)



The inside of Chapin restaurant, on Witherspoon Street (photo by Faith Ho)

from a time of organized Black representation in response to discrimination. However, modern gentrification of Princeton has continued to drive up property taxes since the 20th century. Combined with continuous neighborhood segregation through redlining, the black community is quickly disappearing.

Sixteen years ago, Hillier, coming from a successful career at what was the third-largest architectural firm in the world, returned to his alma mater Princeton to establish Studio Hillier, a gray brick building standing in contrast to the rest of the historic street. Hillier, now a sprightly man in his eighties with silver hair, wears thin-rimmed glasses and a colorful bowtie. At the time he arrived, the neighborhood was already experiencing an influx of Latin American residents. Hillier saw great potential in these houses for their history, location, and a 20% tax deduction. Between a Black homeowner who couldn't afford to pay his loan, a contractor complaining about overcrowding, and a property owner selling a building loaded with asbestos, Hillier bought the properties in shambles. He is adamant about

preserving the area's historic legacy: along Witherspoon and Jackson Streets, he helped to establish Heritage Tour memorial plaques. The stainless metal plaques introduce the buildings' history for self-guided tours, preserving the last traces of what used to be a Black neighborhood.

Now, Hillier's Witherspoon housing properties are experimental projects in his backyard—and he is ambitious. With redevelopment, he hopes to not only repair buildings that are “dangerous and falling apart,” but also set a model for balancing historic preservation and expanding capacity.

In particular, Hillier wants to tackle Princeton's “missing middle” crisis. While Missing Middle Housing is typically “house-scale buildings with multiple units in walkable neighborhoods,” when Hillier talks about it, he refers to the town's lack of middle-income housing. Princeton residents who earn between \$50,000 and \$70,000 struggle to find accommodations, as even one studio costs \$3,000 per month, according to Justin Lesko, the Director of Princeton's Planning Board.

To address this, most of the new units will be transformed from single-family to two-story duplexes, preserving the historic facade while building an extended, modern-looking structure at the rear of each house. Housing units would be divided into studios, which would double the capacity from 34 to 68 housing units. The least expensive studio is predicted to cost \$1,100 per month.

“Believe it or not, we have been working on this project for 10 years and finally are hoping for approval,” Hillier said.

Members of Princeton's municipal government support his plan. “It's a really good example of trying to balance the requirements of historic preservation, keeping what's special about Princeton, while at the same time trying to help solve our little local housing crisis,” David Cohen, board member of the Municipality's Affordable Housing Committee, said. With approvals from the Princeton Environmental Commission and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), the project is heading to a public hearing with the Planning Board, which is currently postponed.

“I'm excited,” Hillier said. “I think we have a good project.”

IN JUNE 2022, LETTERS signed by Hillier Property LLC started to appear at residents' doorsteps. According to Ana Paola Pazmiño, director of Resistencia en Acción, each contained a central message: under Hillier's new redevelopment project, this house would be demolished and reconstructed, regardless of their lease. The tenants would need to prepare for relocation in the next few years. Laminated paper slips landed on porches and front doors, repeating the message in Spanish and English: the structures “are intended to be demolished in part

and rehabilitated sometime in the next 36 months following approvals.” People were left worried and in disbelief. Many residents had lived in their homes for years, if not decades.

“They didn't believe that this was happening to them - people who had lived in a house like that for years,” Regalado, Resistencia's delegate, said.

The residents' concern is grounded in an established link between neighborhood redevelopment and gentrification. Previous redevelopment cases show a similar pattern: after neighborhoods get upgraded with better infrastructure and economic revitalization, they become more expensive, as both costs and demands for housing from higher income classes increase. This feedback loop forces the working-class residents out. Hillier's development project is shaping up to have the same effect, especially since the current residents of his properties are renters, people of color, families with children, and low-income households: some of the most vulnerable populations for displacement.

Regalado estimates that a two-bedroom apartment, which now costs about \$2,600 to \$3,000, will rise to \$4,800 after redevelopment. (Others offer different numbers, ranging from \$1,250 per room from Hillier to \$1,500 from a resident.)

María “Charo” Juega, the former director of the Latin America Legal Defence Fund (LALDEF), has argued that the current units have always been what are called Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH), unsubsidized rental accessible to low-income population due to low market values. However, redevelopment means higher property valuation and rent increase. Even if overall housing capacity increases, the number of affordable units would decrease by 19: a huge

blow to a community of working-class immigrants. The other about 50 houses, she predicts, would only be accessible to high-income tenants.

Veronica Olivares-Weber, a Mexican artist and local activist at Princeton, described the project in a letter to the local online publication Planet Princeton as “unchecked gentrification.”

Indeed, even if residents could afford the higher rent, Regalado countered that large immigrant families would be unable to move into the new, smaller housing units. Many current tenants are families of up to 8 people, while the redeveloped units will mostly be single-occupancy studios. The largest unit would allow up to four people. “I have a family of six. Where am I going to put two more people?” Regalado asked.

“These are big families with children [and] elderly. It’s not that they [Studio Hillier] are just going to come and say, hey, give me the house and leave, right?” Regalado said. He added that most tenants don’t speak enough English, and “it is difficult to understand what’s going on.”

Hillier recognizes the tenants’ discontent and has tried to ease the blow. He said his team talked with each tenant, giving them three solutions: accept the higher rent of a new apartment, move out with a total subsidy of \$2,000 plus their subsidy money, or fill out the affordable housing application with assistance from social workers hired by Studio Hillier.

“That’s 72,000 dollars that we are paying to existing tenants just to get them happily on their way,” Hillier said. Matt Mleczo, the director of a social housing non-profit called Princeton GROWS, said that Hillier is “doing more than is what is legally required” to provide financial assistance. He views Hillier’s public commitment to financial assistance as an integral

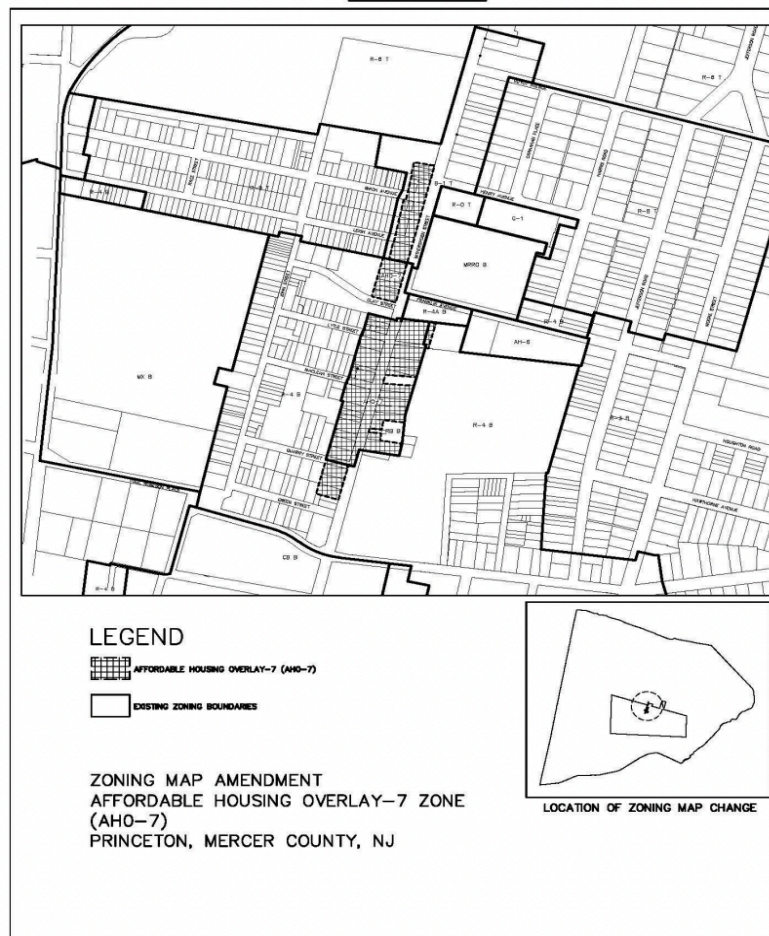
part of modeling equitable housing redevelopment.

“Bob’s not going to throw you out on the street,” Hillier said. “He’s got a plan for everybody.”

The tenants, though, see Hillier’s payment differently. For many, it feels like a dismissal. For them, \$2,000 is insufficient to subsidize resettlement for a low-income family into the usually expensive apartments close to Princeton. The residents propose a counter-offer: if Hillier asks them to leave, then he needs to provide a concrete relocation address. “We are not fighting so that [Studio Hillier] would leave. We are fighting for them to find a place where [the tenants] can go and have a roof over their heads,” Regalado said.

Tension rose at the public hearing of the Historic Preservation

EXHIBIT A



A map of Princeton's affordable housing re-zoning, released in January of 2023 (Taken from Ordinance #2023-02 of Princeton Township)

housing supply, zoning, and property tax. But this project involves dynamics that run deeper in history – and may be out of Hillier’s control.

FOR THE RESIDENTS, much dissatisfaction and anger is drawn from a long history of gentrification and escalating racially-charged anxieties in Princeton.

Over the last few years, the tenants have sparred with Hillier on another issue: his enforcement of overcrowding in his housing units. Because of the shortage of affordable homes in Princeton, undocumented immigrant workers often find housing by illegally subletting bed spaces in Hillier residences. When Hillier finds out about these dealings, he evicts the offending renters. Ten years ago, 46 people poured out onto the street from one housing unit after it caught on fire. “It was terrible,” Hillier said. To the community, however, it feels as though Hillier frequently cites this single incident to stereotype his Latino tenants as a public threat, as Juega argues in an article in *Planet Princeton*.

This is just one of many crises faced by Princeton’s working-class Latino neighborhood. According to Pazmiño’s estimation, about half of the Latino residents in the municipality are undocumented. Without legal status, they are often denied employment certification or formal housing contracts and have no means to fight back. Trump’s threats to stop federal funding for sanctuary cities and to start mass deportation for more than one million undocumented immigrants, including whole families, causes more unease.

To individuals in the Latino community, Trump’s immigration crackdown nationwide is inseparable from the crisis in their community. The two parallel problems paint a troubling future. “We have a problem with *la migración* (the

Commission meeting on January 8th. Juega walked up to confront Hillier. Gesturing to three Latino tenants at the back of the room, she asked: “They are right here, and they will tell you that they don’t know what’s gonna happen. They haven’t been told, nothing’s being explained. Would you care to hear them? Can they speak?”

Hillier crouched in a black office chair by an office table with his colleagues as Juega spoke in front of him. He looked stern and insisted that Studio Hillier’s representative had spoken to all tenants. He felt equally misunderstood.

“It’s wrong for her to be bad-mouthing us, you know, when she doesn’t really understand what we’re doing,” Hillier said.

Hillier knows the economic and architectural technicalities of

Immigration Office)," Regalado said. "And we have another problem: they want to get us out of here and they want to increase the rent."

For Regalado and other residents, the redevelopment plan is but one piece in a racially charged agenda, motivated both by a history of discrimination and a contemporary escalation of immigration issues, to drive Latino immigrants out of the community. Where Hillier sees a historically preserved, affordable, and middle-class neighborhood, the tenants fear displacement, anti-immigration policies, and a new housing crisis.

"We see it as racism," Regalado said. "The white people, they always say that we are a nuisance here." He adds: "It felt very personal towards the Latino community."

Another Clay Street resident, Fernandez, agreed with him. "They don't want us to live here," he said after a Resistencia en Acción rally in Spanish, "Even the children."

They compare their situation to the Black neighborhood's gentrification. "The white people themselves took care of getting [the Black community] out of here," Regalado said, "Five years on, [the neighborhood] has become very crowded with Latinos. So [the white people] see that."

"The only way to get [the Latinos] out of here," he added, "is to raise their rent and do what they're doing."

THE CONFLICT EXCEEDS one developer and his tenants and calls for greater systemic reforms. Matt Mleczko, the director of Princeton GROWS, agrees. "In housing-constrained and supply-constrained places like Princeton," he said, "affordability is a problem for most of the income spectrum."

Mleczko suggests creating a developers and community benefits agreement to ensure the housing security of vulnerable tenants after

redevelopment and calls for further systemic changes.

"Princeton can't solve the housing crisis on its own," he said. "It's going to require a lot of support from the state and federal governments." And it will need an ambitious and creative plan. In the short term: zoning and land-use reform to create affordable market-rate housing, and rental assistance and eviction diversion programs to ensure housing stability. In the long term: community land trusts, inclusionary development plans, and social housing funds.

Eventually, he hopes to change the narrative around housing in the government's decision-making process. Instead of reactively objecting to development plans in public hearings, tenants would be allowed to participate in making that decision. With housing support programs for all populations, we no longer need to decide between prioritizing the "missing

middle" or current tenants.

These reforms are far on the horizon, but there is hope. For Mleczko, regarding Hillier's project, "nothing's been finalized. And so that suggests to me that there's still time to get this right."

With the upcoming Planning Board public hearing, Hillier told me that conflicts might escalate. Regalado confirms. "If they do not reach an agreement," he said, "We will march so that they will listen to us."

ON WITHERSPOON street, alongside Resietencia's "ICE Out of Princeton" signs, Studio Hillier's notification about upcoming demolition plans are taped on many doors. On the porch of a private household hangs a wooden Ginger Man decor, a bright yellow toy truck, and a green children's beach chair.

On the corner of John and

Leigh Street, Marlon Davila, a Guatemalan artist, curated a two-person-tall mural where monarch butterflies fly out of a tree towards the North Stars. Named *Journey*, it celebrates the migration of Hispanic residents and the vibrant cultures they carry.

Unless Studio Hillier and community leaders reconcile to establish agreements before the next public hearing, displacement feels like an impending reality. Soon, like the Heritage Tour memorial plaques, Davila's mural might just become another memorial left by a community that used to exist in this historic place.

This article was edited and fact-checked as part of the Nassau Weekly's journalism section, Second Look. Please submit corrections to thenassauweekly@gmail.com



Marlon Davila's mural, *Journey*, on the corner of John and Leigh Street (photo by Faith Ho)

Signs of Damage

"He looked nice, shy. She didn't say hello, or smile, because despite her costume—a lace trimmed slip and her grandmother's pearl choker—she didn't care much that day."

By LAILA HARTMAN-SIGALL

She is sitting alone, at a maple-stained round table in the back of the cafe. The red nail polish on her fingernails is badly chipped. The woman holds her mug between her palms and takes big sips. It's sweet, the coffee, mixed with heavy cream and three packets of brown sugar crystals. She comes here in the late afternoons, only on Sundays now, impressed that she's finally found a real job and isn't serving homemade treats in plastic bags to dogs at the bakery, like she'd done in school. Both of these jobs asked her for *appropriate attire*, words which bothered her. She likes showing her knees and wearing her hair the way it falls, in uneven curls. It makes her feel sexy.

There is a young girl at the table next to her, maybe four years old, crayoning-in flowers in her coloring book and showing her mother. She takes little licks of the whipped cream atop her hot chocolate and keeps laughing over her mother's phone call. The woman is obsessed with how small the young girl's feet are and keeps trying to position hers beside them, to see how different in size they are.

The radio is playing softly in the cafe, on the French station as usual, but sometimes on the Spanish

station instead, or the Portuguese, or the German. It makes the patrons feel as if they are somewhere far away, and she likes that. She likes most things about the cafe—the music, the thickness of the ceramic mug, the brick, and the mirror. She likes to sit at the table in front of the mirror, so she can stare into her own eyes and watch the door, all without turning her head.

On Friday, her boss said chipped polish is *unprofessional*, she said *women shouldn't show signs of damage or wear*. So now she is picking off the polish and bits of her fingernails are coming off with it. This is what she used to do at The Yappy Barkery while she waited for dogs to drag their humans and beg. She'd always hoped the dogs would lick up the chippings so she didn't have to clean them up, or really, so she didn't have to leave them there and feel something adjacent to guilt. It had been her last year in college, and she'd known couldn't stay there forever, but also thought she'd never leave. So, she'd toyed around with fireable offenses—giving the cuter dogs fuller bags of treats, offering samples of pupcakes, and she even slipped a few twenties from the cash register.

Toward the end of the year, she had picked up extra shifts. Some days she'd show up in torn jogger pants and slippers, and some days she'd pretend to be something else and show up a little self-conscious,

a little glamorous, dressed in silks and high heels. She'd tell the customers she was coming from an event, or an interview. The shop was small, covered in pastel paints and photos of smiling animals. Terry, a large man, and Sully, his golden retriever, came in every Thursday, and she liked to look nice for them. Usually they stayed to talk, but that Thursday afternoon Terry was in a hurry, and he came alone. Once he'd left, she wiped down the counters, sprayed the mirror behind her, put out more napkins, although none had been taken since she'd arrived that morning.

The next man who walked in that Thursday was tall, slim, and he'd spent the morning with his neti-pot, obsessively cleansing. He took full inhales, making sure he'd irrigated effectively. He looked nice, shy. She didn't say hello, or smile, because despite her costume—a lace trimmed slip and her

grandmother's pearl choker—she didn't care much that day.

He didn't have an animal with him. "I have a weapon," he said.

"Right," she said, and she saw his pockets were empty, his pants were slim.

"Turn around," he said, "Don't move till I leave."

She turned around, leaned her back against the glass case of baked goods, and watched through the mirror as he reached into the treat jar on the counter, stuffed a handful in his pocket, and placed a few in his mouth. It was silent for a moment, and then there was the thick crunch of human teeth on a stale, cinnamon, bone-shaped cookie, and the click of the door closing behind him.

The Nassau Weekly is changed for the pawstive by Laila Hartman-Sigall.

Será tu nombre



Juliana, Viviana, Tatiana,
Fiorela, Pamela, Gabriela,
Rosita, Elenita, Lalita...
Cualquiera que sea tu nombre
Tu recuerdo será enorme

Sube una nueva pasajera,
Se para el joven y la deja sentar.
Ninguno se apercibe ¿qué común será?
Pequeña amiguita ¿a dónde andarás?

¿Por tu mochila al colegio?
¿O al mercado a comprar?
¿Buscarás a tus papás?
¿O un amigo por abrazar?

María, Sofía, Alegría,
Irina, Karina, Hermelinda,
Dorita, Ursulita, Bertita...
Cualquiera que sea tu nombre
Tu recuerdo será enorme

De acá veo tus cabellos sucios,
Zapatillas deshechas, gestos mustios,
Antes quiero ver tus pupilas
Y tus lágrimas allí escondidas

Solita sobre piecitos se marcha
Con un sol en la mano y tierra en la cara.
Ambula entre cerros,
Linda niña peruana

Vals peruano

By FRANCISCO ALEJANDRO
BENDEZU ARCINIEGA

Je me uh regrette

Surviving a summer of France,
and worse, adolescence.

By ADAM SANDERS

I'm a fresh 15 years old. I have braces with a wire to pull down a recessed tooth. I wear green acrylic glasses that make me look like an extra in *Mr. Robot*. I'm in Biarritz, France, a small resort city on the southwestern coast. Americans brought surfing to France here. I bring cargo shorts and a French-translated copy of *A Game of Thrones*. I'm three weeks into a summer immersion language program. I feel very, very young.

Everyone else on the trip is seventeen or eighteen. I live in the home of a couple in their 30s who live with their daughter in one room. I am one of three American boys staying there. The daughter, 8, hates us because we have stolen her room for the summer, and because our French is bad, and because she is scared of us as boys.

I am scared of these boys: Javier and Markus, both 17. They are tall and thin. Their skin is tauter than mine, their cheeks less round with youth. They know how to put in contact lenses, and how to speak to our homestay family with the *subjonctif*, and how to smoke a cigarette and talk with confidence to one another. They wear thin tee shirts that hang off wide shoulders, board

shorts, white sneakers. They know how to gauge who around them is worth looking at and who they will make fun of in a Snapchat group. They know that our teacher—a red-faced Midwesterner with strawberry-blonde pigtails—is uncool, and that she is not worth their listening, and that making it to class is less important than sitting on the beach—the *Grande Plage*—all night with the girls and beers and cigarettes.

They know how to kiss and have sex. They know how to talk about people's bodies, to dissect them into references and innuendo. They know how to count the boys they walk alongside and the girls they kiss and touch and ignore. They know how to charm our host mother, how to kiss *bisous*, how to say grace.

I know none of these things. My French is shaky and slow. I can't keep pace on our runs, and the shirts we buy at the surf shop swell and pucker on my round shoulders. I hate the polo shirts I've packed. I hate their fluency with girls and the fact they want them. I had come to learn French, but I am being asked to learn pauses, gestures, and looks, and I hate it. I don't hate things. I hate that I hate this.

Javier is nice to me: he sleeps in the bed parallel to mine, and lends me his books, and sometimes holds me back before we get to the *Grande Plage* to whisper advice. He points me to a girl I should talk to, and I talk to her, and I

feel proud when he smiles. He speaks Spanish, and so while the Americans jabber loudly, he slinks away to sit and smoke a joint with the Spaniards down the beach.

Markus makes my skin crawl. He's thin and fit and does pull-ups on a beam in our room. He asks me how many I can do, and he laughs when I answer. He comes back past curfew and turns on the lights, waltzing in and asking us to smell his fingers. He keeps a list on his phone of the girls he has gotten on this trip. He's a slob. He smells like cigarettes. He's obsessed with Germany, and I think it's lame. It's shameful, or instructive, or worse, to know him.

Every night, we go to the *Grande Plage* and everyone sits with their feet in the cold, wet sand and drinks and smokes. My hands are clean. The city goes right up to the beach, and still the sand is fresh, and the water clear. No one speaks any French. There must be a hundred teenagers here every night, communicating in broken English and Spanish and German, showing each other photos on our phones and immersing ourselves in anecdotes and body language. I hold a White Claw sometimes, but I don't drink it. Markus tousles my hair.

He drinks a ton. He shoves a beer at me and calls me a pussy when I place it down unopened. And I feel like a



pussy, or I feel like a wimp, or I feel very gay, and quite young—incessantly, shamefully young. I can't learn how to grow up right now, maybe never at all, and not like how he has. His spectre distorts and mutates. He's a sociopath. He's a fast learner. He's a charmer, or the snake.

When I can, I slip away from the horde and look at the dark water and remind myself I wanted to be here. I try desperately to make this a learning moment, but I won't learn. I don't grow up at all. I don't have my first drink, and I don't kiss anyone or smoke a cigarette. My French does not improve.

This night, Javier goes off as he does to speak to the Spaniards. There's a girl around his arm. I spend a while talking to some of the other younger kids. The 14-year-olds, two of them, have a curfew and complain. In Brooklyn, they can stay out later. I go back to the top of the beach, where the older guys lean against a wall and smoke. Markus is there alone, lying on the sand. He has had a lot to drink, someone jokes. He sits up, hearing his name, and turns over, puking. A girl in our class asks me to bring him back to our apartment. I get him to his feet, and put his arm around my shoulder, and begin the trudge up the hill from the beach.

He starts to ramble like usual: he misses Utah, but not because he's Mormon; he is Mormon, but Mormons

are gay. The guys here act faggy because they're rich. France is so lazy. We stop at a bench so he can throw up in a trash can. He's hungry. I buy him a cheeseburger. He eats it slowly, and when we get up to walk further up the hill, he pukes again, and I hold his head up, awkwardly, my ring fingers around his neck. 5 minutes later, we sit down at a bench along a busy road, and he dozes off. I call my mom and tell her in a bored tone that I'm walking Markus up to our apartment because he's drunk. We're taking a break because he's tired, and I am tired. No, I wasn't drinking, you know me.

Markus hears me and curses me out, so I hang up, and pull him to his feet. I grab his left arm and sling it around my shoulder—he's taller, and so his knees bend and sway as we head up the hill. With each step I take, he lurches forward, his shoulder digging into my back. The air smells like spruce trees and nighttime and trash. I turn my head to the left to breathe in. Markus reeks—of hot breath, of sweat, of perfume, cut with beer, vomit, and cigarettes.

We make it to the apartment house at the top of the hill. I shrug him off onto a bench and look up in the window to see if our homestay mother is asleep. It's long past curfew, and she has been upset before. I hear Markus groan and turned to see him unzipping his pants. His head lolls back, mouth agape. He's

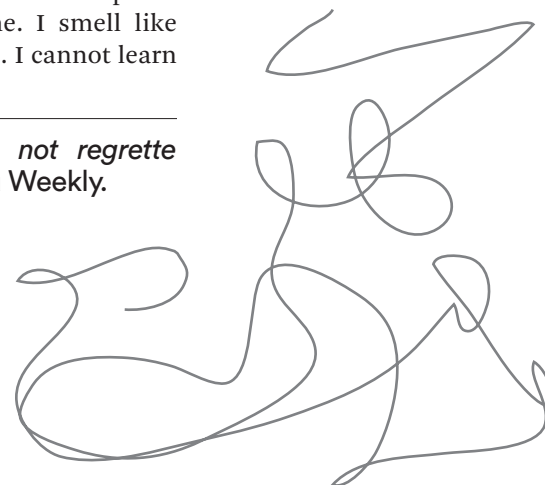
pissing in her garden.

Shit, shit, shit. It's too late. We go inside, and quietly make our way upstairs. I get him into bed and make sure he takes out his contacts. Javier sits up, and then back down. I pass out as soon as I hit my bed. The lights are on.

The next morning at breakfast, I receive a death stare from our host. Apparently, I've peed in her garden, she begins to tell me in English. It takes a while. Chansons play from a small radio, but are interrupted with an ad for *Les Indestructibles 2*. I stare at a digital clock as the divider between hours and minutes pulses. Markus has a headache. His seat is empty.

Je me uh regrette. I apologize in broken French: for the earth I did not soil, for my youth, for my slowness. Markus has a headache. Javier and I head by ourselves to class. He checks Snapchat and doesn't look at me. I smell like sweat. Nothing changes. I cannot learn and will not learn.

Adam Sanders does not regrette writing for the Nassau Weekly.



How Prophecy was Invented

“In another town, she was a storyteller, but the children had spit back her stories wrong, turning the characters into parodies of themselves.”

By ZIYI YAN

The smoke rose no higher than the stake. Even fire was reluctant to grant the town a spectacle. The priest, who sat farthest from the witch, could not see that the fire had been lit, and stood up in frustration. Get on with it. Are you doing it or not?

The women wanted the witch to pray, or sing, or scream. Everyone knew how the witch had killed the priest's child before it even left the womb. Even so, the town's women thirsted for martyrdom. There were no words for the plunder that they had endured— for the dull dread that they, too, had lost their children. Without knowing why, they wanted to join the witch in the fire in a collective howl that ripped the air so neatly, heaven would fall straight through.

The witch was to be pressed to death with stones, but when the men scoured the riverbank, there were no stones to be found— only soft clay and the body of a girl who had died months before, on her wedding night. At first, it had not concerned the townspeople that the young bride no longer showed her

face in public. They spoke of her fondly, happily, as mist collapsed onto her still-warm body. The girl's beauty was unchanged when the men dragged her back to town, where nobody seemed to recognize her. Still, they thought she was deserving of a proper burial. As night fell, the men heaved shovelfuls of dirt into her newly-dug burial plot until it filled her nostrils and crusted her eyelids shut. Her coffin heaved with the weight of the earth until finally, it splintered apart. The stones were forgotten.

The priest's wife was still at home, mourning her daughter. The baby had been left with the midwife for only a few hours— afterward, the baby's face was crushed, her limbs twisted out of proportion. This, at least, is what the priest told his wife. Worse, the midwife had insisted on burning with the baby in her arms. When pleading did not work, the men tried to take the baby by force— the midwife's screams created such regular percussion against the walls of the church that even the priest's wife could hear it, from the bedchamber where she was hiding— where she was hidden. But the midwife refused to let go of the baby.

Delirious, in bed, the priest's wife realized that the witch was starting to feel the first touch of fire against her feet. This was a dream she had dreamt before. The dream started with a lace

neckline, waiting to spill open. It started at a party. No, it started in a boyfriend's basement. Today, it starts when the fire is waist high.

The men start to jeer and cough at the smoke, but the women gape at the sky. A large, black crow plunges at the girl on the stake and tugs at the bundle near her chest. She does not resist. The bird carries the bundle in front of the pyre and unwraps it carefully, maternally. Instead of a mangled child, the cloth falls open to reveal a single, perfectly round stone. The girl breaks her silence at last with a gasping laugh. The need for air strangles into birdsong. It sounds like cackling— like strange music. At this moment, the priest's wife remembers that she is not yet married, and prays that her husband will keep his word. Be happy. They will let you keep him.

The wife-to-be wakes up. She has cut her hair for the first time in months, and she is still in a giving mood. The boy has put his priest costume back on, and she giggles at how silly it makes him look. She smiles as if into a mirror and runs her small hands across the back of his neck. He smiles back at her meaningfully, searchingly, as if he can see past her skin and into her beating corpse. In a few months, the boy will give his wife a stone, and she will say no, of course I'm happy. The sound of rain against their

walls will be weak and terrifying.

The fire reaches the girl's neck, and she begins to recount a story that her mother once told her—a story of two lovers. They had been banished from their town. They walked for two days and two nights in search of a new home, before a brutal storm set in. Water tore the dead air from moment to moment, forcing them to seek refuge. Yet by morning, the cave had closed its mouth around them— in searching for an exit to their hideout, they were only drawn deeper into the earth. At first, the lovers vowed to wait for rescue. But with hunger came delirium. Everywhere, there was a warm body to bite into— their own bodies trying to live. They wasted away together, hungry for each others' flesh, wallowing in each others' filth. The woman was half-alive when she killed her lover with a stone. Eating away at his body by day, she used his bones to chip away at the cave walls, until finally, she saw sunlight.

Today, an entire town loses their sight after laying eyes on this stone. The still-silent witch knows not to look. But such dreams are unimportant. As the townspeople shout and stumble blindly, the witch frees herself from the ropes and escapes. The cold rain batters her body as she runs into the forest. She does not know what she has done. She recalls something having been clawed out from her insides and patched over her skin— like plastic strips, clinging only by the tackiness of water. She thinks of arteries splayed like turkey legs, with all the right cavities waiting to be stuffed. The cries cascading upstream of the uterus. The boy who had swam with her in the river. The man who had been kind enough to leave when her first daughter came as a stone.

In another town, she was a storyteller,

but the children had spit back her stories wrong, turning the characters into parodies of themselves. The symbols bled into each other and birthed each other until they were absurd and indistinguishable. Years ago, her living children had drank the river's anger and journeyed upstream.

Anyhow, there were too many boys to bear in the town with the timid fires. There was the priest's wife, who grew sicker by the day, and the sky, which refused to rain for twelve days, and her bloody nightgown, crucified nightly on the clothesline. There was the priest, who prayed for a god who could birth himself, and then for a living son in the years to come, but never for his wife's forgiveness.

Every time, near the end of the witch's stories, the still-beautiful wife cried not for her husband, but for air. But today, there is no sound, only a child buried beneath her polyester blanket, turning in her sleep. In her dreams, she sees a midwife swaddling a crying thing that looks nothing like the priest. In her dreams, she hears a woman calling for her daughter.

Far past the woods, the midwife closes the girl's eyes and touches her forehead— smooth as stone— with too much tenderness. I will tell you a different story, she says.

This is the last time they will see each other.

Ziyi Yan burns bright in the pages of the Nassau Weekly.

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